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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study which assessed attitude changes of 15 New York City graduate students who were required to take a course about the cultural heritage and contemporary status of black Americans. The course was designed to give students a broad perspective based on historical and current literature, textbooks, newspapers, magazines, and professional publications; interpretation and analysis of demographic data; and active participation in ethnic cultural, political, and social events. Data were derived from a pre and post instruction questionnaire that measured attitude change. Findings indicated that there were changes in the attitudes of students participating in the course. Data are included as well as descriptions of statistical procedures used. (MK)

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ATTITUDINAL CHANGES IN A CULTURAL HERITAGE COURSE ABOUT BLACK AMERICANS

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Introduction

The U.S. Commission on Mental Health (1965) lists "racism" as the number one health problem in the United States. Comer (1972) concurs and adds that racism continues to hamper the growth and development of all people. Numerous authors go farther, indicting racism with responsibility for genocide - psychological, sociological, and physical - of Third World people (Grier and Cobbs 1968; Jones 1972; Yette 1971).

In the United States specifically, in 1978, problems generated and fostered by racism continue to plague us all - black and white alike. Although the effects of racism on black people have been studied and discussed long and often, the insidious results of racism and ethrocentric attitudes on white people are mentioned rarely. If racism can be perceived as a disease with deleterious effects on both whites and blacks, perhaps more salubrious methods can be found to combat it.

Katz and Ivey (1977) underscore the seriousness of the problem by stating:

> It becomes obvious that most white people are not willing to come to grips with the true reality of racism. Indeed, the disease of racism runs deeply through every white citizen. The behaviors that are considered normal of white people in relation to Third World people would be considered symptoms of emotional disturbance if exhibited towards members of one's own race (Clark 1963). In addition, because reality is distorted when

> one is mentally ill, there is a difficulty in coping with reality. In this sense, racism can also be seen as a disease (p.486).

One of the techniques suggested for use in dealing with the issue of racism is the curricular approach (Hunter 1972). This approach has often failed to change racist attitudes because the presentation was made solely on a cognitive or informational level. Because attitudinal changes, which relate to feelings and the affective domain, precede any behavioral change, a curriculum approach embodying both the cognitive and the affective aspects of learning should be more successful in developing better race relations (Clark and Kadis 1971; Goodman, Simon and Witort 1972; Simon and Carnes 1969; Sussna 1972).

Subjects and Procedures

Based on the literature which supported a curricular approach with cognitive and affective objectives as a means by which to change racist attitudes, this researcher sought to assess attitudinal change of students who were required to take a 15-week course about the cultural heritage and contemporary status of Black Americans.

The class chosen for the study consisted of 15 students enrolled in the graduate program of a large university located in New York City. All of the students lived and worked in the New York Metropolitan area. The group was comprised of 13 whites and 2 blacks; 8 women and 7 men between 28 and 35 years of age. Limitations related to the applicability of the study's findings are based on these data.

At the first session of the course, the cognitive and affective objectives were presented for the 15 weeks as follows:

1. to assist class members to acquire a relevant body of basic knowledge and understanding of the history and heritage of today's Afro Americans, their contributions to American history and culture, and their present economic, political, and social status;

2. to assist class members to raise their levels of consciousness by helping them to identify racism in their life style and experience;

3. to assist class members to understand experiences from which racist attitudes and behaviors develop;

4. to assist class members to consider steps to be taken and to take action against institutional and individual racism.

The course outline, required readings, supplementary bibliography, and list of assignments, distributed and discussed at this first class meeting, were designed to give students a broad perspective based on the examination of historical and current literature, textbooks, newspapers, magazines, and professional publications; interpretation and analysis of comparative demographic data; active participation in ethnic cultural, political, and social events.

Two types of evaluative techniques, derived from the course objectives described above, were set forth as measures of student performance. First, a variety of traditional written assignments (e.g. term paper, reading critiques, final examination) were introduced to measure the students' acquisition of data consistent with the cognitive or factual

objectives of the course. Although these assignments were necessary to the grading process required by the university, they were not relevant to the purpose of this study.

Second, since the study was concerned with measuring the effect of this 15-week required course on student attitudes, a questionnaire was prepared consistent with the affective or "feelings" objectives of the curriculum.

The format used for the 15 sessions consisted of a mixture of lectures, discussions, presentations by outside speakers, human relations films, trips and group work (e.g. small and large group activities requiring problem solving and interaction concerning human development themes).

Statistical Techniques

In order to determine whether or not the affective objectives of this 15-session, 30-hour course had been realized in the form of attitudinal changes by the students enrolled, a questionnaire was designed and administered on a pretest and posttest basis to the course participants(N = 15).

Questions for the questionnaire were selected by this investigator, in consultation with experts in the field of human relations, following extensive research with materials from a variety of sources (Canfield and Wells 1976; Harmin, Kirschenbaum, and Simon 1973; Morgan 1973; Pfeiffer and Jones 1971). These materials were modified, changed, and adapted to form questions suitable to the age level, educational sophistication, and ethnic specificity required by the curriculum.

The questionnaire, which consisted of 20 statements, required respondents to circle anonymously (Borg and Gall 1971) by choosing one of the

following responses:

SD = Strongly Disagree

D = Disagree

U = Uncertain

A = Agree

SA = Strongly Agree.

The administration of the questionnaire occurred on the 1st and 15th sessions of the course at which all members of the class were present, thereby providing a pretest and posttest sample with inherent pairing (Croxton and Cowden 1955).

Data collected on the questionnaires were scored, using the following point system assigned to each response:

1 = SD

2 = D

3 = U

4 = A

5 = SA.

Since the questionnaire statements were constructed with "SA" as the response indicating the most racially unbiased attitude, the response "SD" as the most racially biased attitude, and the responses "A", "U", and "D" as sequentially in between these two extremes, it was assumed that the higher the score the better in terms of nonracist attitudes.

On the pretest forms, each of the 20 questions was scored using the point system described above. A total score for each student was obtained, as well as a mean for each student. An identical process was utilized to

obtain total scores and means for the posttest data. Table 1, which appears below, presents a comparison of these data.

Table 1

COMPARISON OF MEAN PRETEST AND POSTTEST DATA OBTAINED ON QUESTIONNAIRES ADMINISTERED IN A CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CONTEMPORARY STATUS COURSE ABOUT BLACK AMERICANS

Student	Pretest	Posttest	X_D Difference	X^2_D
1	3.600	4.600	+ 1.000	1.0000
2	4.450	4.350	- .100	.0100
3	4.200	3.850	- .350	.1225
4	4.350	4.600	+ .250	.0625
5	4.300	4.600	+ .300	.0900
6	3.200	3.500	+ .300	.0900
7	4.150	4.550	+ .400	.1600
8	4.350	3.700	- .650	.4225
9	4.350	4.700	+ .350	.1225
10	3.500	4.450	+ .950	.9025
11	2.500	4.000	+ 1.500	2.2500
12	2.450	5.000	+ 2.550	6.5025
13	3.900	4.200	+ .300	.0900
14	4.000	4.650	+ .650	.4225
15	3.850	4.950	+ 1.100	1.2100
		Totals	+ 8.550	13.4575

As it was stated previously, the 15 students who were given the pretest also took the posttest, thereby providing a non-independent sample. Croxton and Cowden (1955) indicate:

> When inherent pairing exists between the pairs of items in two samples, it usually follows that the two samples are not independent (p. 654).

In order to test the significance of the difference between the means obtained on the pretest questions and the posttest questions, this researcher obtained the difference D between each pair of values, determined the value of $\bar{X}_D$, and ascertained whether $\bar{X}_D$ differed significantly at the .05 level from 0. Using the null hypothesis that $\bar{X}_D$ is the mean of a random sample from a population of differences having a mean of zero, the following data were computed from the formulas below:

1. $\bar{X}_D = \frac{\Sigma X_D}{N} = \frac{8.550}{15} = .5700$

2. $\sigma_D = \sqrt{\frac{\Sigma x^2_D}{N-1} - \frac{(\Sigma X_D)^2}{N(N-1)}}$

$= \sqrt{\frac{13.4575}{14} - \frac{(8.550)^2}{15(14)}}$

$= .7829$

3. $\sigma_{\bar{x}_D} = \frac{\sigma_D}{\sqrt{N}} = \frac{.7829}{\sqrt{15}} = .2021$

When a two-tailed t test was performed, it yielded the following result:

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_D - 0}{\sigma_{\bar{X}_D}} = \frac{.5700 - 0}{.2021} = 2.8203$$

Reference to the Values of t table (N = 14) indicated that P is clearly significant at the .05 level (lies between .02 and .01). Based on these data, it was concluded that there was a significant difference at the .05 level between the pretest and posttest means obtained by the students on the questionnaire administered in this study.

Summary and Conclusions

"Racism" continues to be an important mental health problem in the United States, with deleterious effects on the emotional and social growth of both blacks and whites.

Some educators, psychologists, and sociologists recommend a curricular approach to change racist attitudes. Curricular approaches which are cognitive or factual often fail. It appears that a course of study which includes both the cognitive and affective levels of learning may be more effective in causing attitudinal change, fostering behavioral growth, and improving race relations.

The study undertaken by this researcher in a 15-session required course concerning the cultural heritage and contemporary status of Afro Americans in the United States sought to determine whether attitudinal change might occur from a curriculum based on cognitive and affective objectives. Significant difference at the .05 level was obtained based

on the pretest and posttest administration of a 20-question questionnaire.

This investigator plans to continue the use of this questionnaire in future offerings of this course in order to reach larger groups and to collect further reliability and validity evidence (Borg & Gall 1971).

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